

Under Fire

By RICHARD PARKER

Based on the drama of
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Authors of "Under Cover" and co-author
of "It Pays to Advertise"

SYNOPSIS.

George Wagstaff, daughter of Sir George, of the British admiralty, finds at a dinner between her governess, Ethel Willoughby, and Henry Streetman, Ethel's cousin. Henry Streetman calls on Ethel and while waiting for her talks to Brewster, Sir George's butler, who is a German spy, about his failure to get admiral's papers in Sir George's possession. He claims to German secret service headquarters.

A fine young Englishwoman is caught in the net of international plotting and is made the victim of circumstances—tragic circumstances. She becomes innocently involved with an enemy of her country and she proceeds to use her as a tool. How she is cornered and prodded, as boys might tease a wounded wild animal, is told vividly in this installment.

Streetman, the German spy, and Roeder (alias Brewster, the butler), are discussing the possibility of war.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

"Yes, yes! Of course!" Streetman agreed hastily, as if he would forestall any patriotic exhibition. "Still, one would like to live with the luxuries of life. One day I shall make the grand coup; and then to cease all this—" He broke off suddenly, for he heard Miss Willoughby stirring on the other side of that closed door. "Shush! To the door!"

"Very good, Brewster!" Mr. Streetman said in a clear, firm voice, which he intended to carry well beyond that closed door. "I'll wait here for Miss Willoughby."

CHAPTER III.

A Foe in the Household.

Brewster had hardly closed the doors behind him before Ethel Willoughby appeared.

"Oh, Henry! You surprised me," she said.

"I came before the others," Streetman explained, "because there is something you must do for me at once."

"About the fleet, I suppose," she said, somewhat wearily, as she turned away from him.

"How did you know?" He shot the question at her almost too quickly for caution. But for the moment he experienced something approaching alarm. But her answer reassured him.

"Nowadays it is only of the fleet you ask," she told him. "And she regarded him with eyes that were pathetic, if not reproachful. Once it had seemed to her that Henry Streetman was interested in her. But of late she had been obliged to admit to herself that that interest had quickly waned. Her handsome caller paid no attention to the obvious complaint that lay in Ethel's answer. In the most matter-of-fact fashion he proceeded straight to the business that was uppermost in his mind.

"You must learn at once from Sir George where the ships at Spithead are going," he announced bluntly. "Find out if they sail together, or if they will disperse—and how."

As she faced him again there was hesitating in her voice, her eyes, her whole manner.

"Wait, Henry, wait!" she begged. "Before we go into that, tell me—when are you going to let people know we're married?"

Streetman remembered then that he had a many-sided role to play. And thereupon he went up to the girl; and taking one of Ethel's hands in his, while he put an arm around her, he looked down at her in a most lovelike fashion.

"Ah, my dear! I'd let them know now—this minute—if I only could!" he exclaimed.

"But we must announce our marriage at once," she said quickly.

"Announce our marriage—why?"

"George Wagstaff told me just a few minutes ago that when I said I was in Brighton a friend of hers saw you and me together in Paris. He replied in tragic tones.

"You did not explain?" he asked.

"That we were on our honeymoon? No! I kept my word to you. I said I was in Brighton." She looked at him in a puzzled way as he left her then and paced the floor in a nervous fashion.

"Of course, it's easily proved that I was not in Brighton," Ethel continued. "George seemed to think you and I—"

"Well—you can imagine what she must have thought. Oh! why must there be this secrecy? I loathe it."

She sank upon the settee and stared moodily at the floor—a most unhappy picture of a pretty bride.

Streetman roused himself and bent over her.

"My dear! We must wait until I can arrange matters with my family,"

he explained in his most plausible manner. "Until I can come into my own again we should starve. Soon it will all be arranged." And once more he turned away from her—this time with an air of finality—as if there were really no argument against his vague protestations.

"Soon? You have said that for a month," Ethel reminded him. "You've said it ever since we were married."

"Next week, then!" he agreed in desperation. "I promise! And you will learn tonight about the fleet?" he added in the same breath.

"But, Henry, if I do ask Sir George and he tells me, isn't it rather a shabby thing to do then to come to you and—"

"No, no, no—as I've often told you!" he interrupted. "It seemed to him that her objections were interminable. And under the stress of the urging from his superiors his forbearance was fast reaching its end. To hide his anxiety and his irritation, he stepped to the window and looked out.

"But Sir George trusts me," Ethel resumed. Streetman stifled a mouth-filling German oath while he listened to her. "When he answers my questions," she continued, "he does so because he thinks I'm just idly curious. He never dreams I'd repeat what he says to anyone. It all puts me in a beastly position. Sir George is a loyal Englishman, and if he thought—"

Streetman would not let her finish. He wheeled about and said sharply, to forestall even the merest mention of such a thing as an informer—let alone a spy—

"And you are a loyal Englishwoman—and I am loyal to France."

"Then why do you pass yourself off as an Englishman?"

"Because it is the wish of my employers, the French secret service. It is the wish of France," he declared in a grand manner, which he intended to carry conviction with it.

"It's all quite beyond me," she said with a hopeless air. They had had many such discussions. And never yet had she been able to understand the reasons that Streetman put forth with unvarying glibness. "Why should France wish to know about our fleet?"

"Ah! that I do not know," he replied. "The secret service gives me their instructions. It is for me to follow, not to question them. It is my work—my future." He drew nearer to her, and his masterful eyes gazed full into hers. "It is our future, Ethel!" he cried with apparent emotion.

"But isn't France England's ally?" she asked. "I can't understand why she should need this information."

"In times like these it is best for each country to know all possible about every country," he explained. "You will be doing no wrong to England when you get me the facts I desire." He sat down beside her, and, placing his arm about her, he drew her close to him. "You will find out tonight about the fleet?" he pleaded.

But there was something about his persistent wheedling that made Ethel Willoughby—or Mrs. Streetman—suspicious.

"I can't help feeling that there is something behind all this—something you are not telling me," she said slowly.

Despite his confident air, Streetman could not easily look into her searching eyes. He was uncomfortable.

"No! All That Is Over," she said. And he rose abruptly and took a few quick, restless steps about the room.

"Why—what an imagination!" he exclaimed, forcing a laugh at last. "Really, Ethel, you're quite absurd!"

"But always, before we were married, you were so kind, so thoughtful. You talked only of pretty things. But now, always it is the fleet—the navy. You seem interested only in their plans, their secrets. . . . Is it for that you married me?"

Streetman's patience had reached the breaking point. And at the question he flew into a sudden rage. He turned a face like a thundercloud upon her.

"And on my side I ask why you married me? For love? . . . I think not!" he sneered.

His quick anger brought Ethel to her feet.

"But, Henry—"

He waved her answer aside as if it were not worth his listening to.

"Once, perhaps, I thought so," he said, talking her down like a common brewster. "But now I hear it was another man whom you really loved—a young Irishman who went away

without doing you the honor of asking you to marry him." In his words there was, as he intended there should be, a taunt that implied more than he actually said.

"No, no!" Ethel cried. "It isn't true. It was just a flirtation—a few dances—a theater or two!"

"Oh! That was all!" he retorted. "And yet they told me you had known him all your life."

"I don't know whom you're talking about," she said in desperation.

"Nor do I," he rejoined. "It was some man in the army—a captain, I think. I do not know his name; but I shall find it out, and then perhaps I shall learn if you cared for me at all or if it was just that I caught you on the rebound."

"What do you mean?" She faced him tensely. Such scenes were new to her. Trouble, of a sort, she had known. But never anything like this. It had been hard enough to see her resources dwindling steadily, without the means of replenishing them, and with actual penury staring her in the face. But now Ethel knew that that was as nothing compared with the situation in which she had unwittingly placed herself. To be tied for life to a man who did not love her—who seemed an absolute brute—that was worse, a thousand times, than any mere financial difficulties.

Streetman did not at once reply to her. For a few moments he regarded her balefully, as if she were already a hateful thing in his eyes.

"I wonder, my dear," he said at last, "I wonder if today it is only I that count with you or if you have—memories. . . . We shall see."

"No, no, Henry!" she protested. "I'm—I'm very fond of you," she said brokenly.

"Fond?" The smile that he gave her was nothing if not cruel. "Come, then! Kiss me!" He and she pushed him away from her.

"No! All that is over. Not until we can let people know. This secrecy makes me feel as if I were not your wife. What George said is enough to make me believe, almost, that it has all been just some horrible intrigue."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" he scoffed. "If I promise you now that next week we make our marriage public, will you believe me?"

"Yes, Henry! I will!" she said in a voice in which there rang renewed hope.

He stepped quickly to her side again. Henry Streetman was not the sort of man to miss any opportunity that offered.

"But to do that," he stipulated, "I must secure for France this information concerning the fleet. That will mean promotion for me—money—much money! And with that I need no longer wait on my family. You understand?" He asked her.

"Yes, Henry! I do!"

"Good! That's settled. And you will take the first opportunity to speak to Sir George?" He was filled with elation at the happy turn of affairs. But he was doomed to quick disappointment. "You will?" he persisted.

"No!"

"What?" he exclaimed, scarcely believing his ears.

"I understand that for some reason you are trying to bribe me with these promises of yours to betray Sir George's confidence. But I'm sick of this deception. I won't do it any longer; and you oughtn't to ask it of me."

"Indeed!" he said, with a vicious show of scorn. "And if it should happen to come to Sir George anonymously?"—he stressed the word—"that you had already betrayed his confidence? What would your position be here?"

He watched her narrowly, to see what effect his threat might have upon her.

"You wouldn't do that?" she exclaimed, as a sudden fear gripped her. All at once it struck Ethel that her position had indeed become desperate. She had not dreamed that she would find herself in such an impasse—and at the hands of her husband, of all people.

"I should not like to do it," Streetman replied. "But I intend to learn—I shall learn—about the fleet tonight; and through you!" he declared, with undisguised determination.

She turned upon him like some hunted wild thing then, ready to fight desperately in one last, mad effort.

"Oh! So that's what your love, your affection, amounts to, is it?"

"Put it any way you choose," was his caustic answer. "But I must have this information. . . . Come! What do you say?"

"What is there for me to say?"

"Exactly!" he retorted. "I am glad to see that at last you appreciate the situation." They both started then at the sound of voices. "It is Sir George," Streetman said. "I shall leave presently. But I shall come back in an hour. . . . And you will have found out about the fleet?"

"Oh! I suppose so," she replied. "But it makes me hate myself—and you!"

"Really? What a pity!" he said with mock sympathy.

CHAPTER IV.

Gathering Storm-Clouds.

And then Sir George Wagstaff joined them, with his trusted butler, Brewster, in his wake, bearing a muffin tray.

Ethel went eagerly to meet her benefactor. At least, her manner was blithesome; but her heart was laden.

"Hello, Sir George!" she said.

"Hello, Ethel!" They were good pals—those two. The daughter of one of his oldest and dearest friends, Ethel had always occupied a niche all her own in Sir George's affections. Sir George was not of the big type

of Englishman. He was, on the contrary, not much over the height of Ethel herself. But he was undeniably impressive, with his keen, gray eyes, his fast-whitening hair, and his exquisite manners. And despite the punctilious politeness that Sir George displayed to everybody, there was something in his bearing that warned one that he was no person to trifle with.

"I just dropped in for a few minutes because I'd promised to come to your tea, Ethel; and I try never to break my word to so charming a lady."

She made a pretty curtsy. "Thank you, Sir George!"

"For you, at the admiralty, these must be troublous times?" Streetman ventured.

"Rather busy, yes!" was Sir George's somewhat short answer. He was always ready, when at leisure, to enter

upon a discussion of any topic—except such as touched upon his high office. And there he was exceedingly touchy.

"You think, then, there will be war between Russia and Germany?" Streetman asked him eagerly. He could not do otherwise than ignore Sir George's slightly frigid reply to his previous question. If he felt any resentment, he trusted to be able to pay off the score in his own way, later.

Sir George lifted his eyebrows ever so slightly as he glanced at Ethel's caller.

"That, sir, is a matter I should prefer not to discuss," he replied.

"Parson me, sir, but as a loyal Englishman I am naturally interested."

And then Ethel stationed herself behind the tea table.

"Come! Let's talk of peace and tea," she said. It made her feel guilty to sit there and hear Streetman try to pry information out of Sir George beneath his own roof. And it seemed that the least she could do to repay him for his many kindnesses was to protect him as best she might from Streetman's indefatigable curiosity.

They had no sooner taken their cups from her when George Wagstaff burst into the room.

"Hello, everybody!" she greeted them. "Here's Guy and his mother." Close behind her followed Mrs. Stephen Falconer and her good-looking son, who was, as everybody knew, more than devoted to Sir George Wagstaff's vivacious daughter. "We've had been here earlier," George explained, "but Mrs. Falconer and Guy had gone to a matinee."

"Silly show!" the blase Guy added in a bored drawl. "The eternal triangle or some such nonsense!"

"Very tiresome!" his mother agreed. "And so noisy! Full of shots and pistols—and mostly about some poor creature who'd sinned and repented."

"That's the sort of play I disapprove of, particularly for my daughter," Sir George commented from his place on the settee. "I am glad, George, that you were not there."

"Oh! I saw it last week," said George with mischievous satisfaction. "And you ought to go, father. You'd weep over the heroine. Frightfully damaged lady—wasn't she, Guy?"

"Oh, frightfully!" said Guy. "Completely beyond repair!"

"I knew the minute she walked on she wasn't a good woman. She was so pale and eerie, and so beautifully dressed!" George explained, as she watched her father squirm. Shocking her respectable parent was one of George's favorite diversions.

"You mustn't talk this silly cynicism," Ethel reproved the two young people.

"Don't worry!" George retorted. "Father knows I don't get that sort of chat from my very proper governess. It's just hereditary from him. I express what he feels but doesn't dare say."

But Sir George refused to be annoyed by his daughter's hectoring.

"At least I deserve credit for my modesty," he observed dryly.

Will Ethel get the damaging naval information from Sir George—and will she refuse to pass it along? Or will Sir George, suddenly suspicious of unexplained actions, refuse to talk to the girl?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

VOGUES AND VANITIES

JULIA BOTTOMLEY



In Her Party Frock.

The little miss, with the pretty curls, looks well in the simplest of her frocks. She is sweetly conscious of being "all dressed up" and is entirely satisfied with things as they are. This is a state of mind most comfortable for all concerned.

The little party frock pictured above is made of such simple and inexpensive materials that every small girl is entitled to have her instinct for finery indulged. It requires nothing more extravagant than albatross cloth in cream white, a little venetian lace in an all-over pattern and plain cream white net for the sleeves. The albatross is a light weight wool fabric in a crepe-like weave which has the advantage of being washable. It comes in white and all colors. Venetian lace is familiar as a pretty and serviceable sort which is just as washable as the plain net of which the sleeves are made.

In this dress the skirt is joined to a plain short sleeveless waist. With its fullness disposed in a group of plaits at each side the skirt hangs in a panel at the front and back. The short body is supported by narrow straps over the shoulder and fastens with small buttons and button holes in the back. The

Lingerie Blouses.

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